

## ZONING UPS AND DOWNS

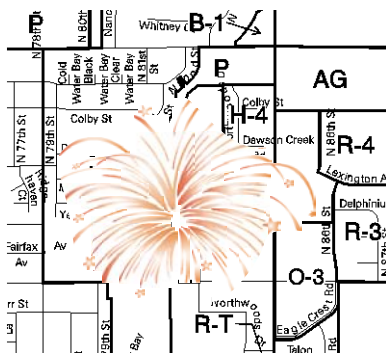
"Incompatible/out of scale," "Those renters...," "This will increase traffic on our local streets where our children play," and "Our property values will decline" are common themes voiced by homeowners in Lincoln and most other communities when developers propose higher density residential developments nearby. The adopted Comprehensive Plan embraces the idea of a mix of housing in every neighborhood, with duplexes, townhouses and apartments as well as single-family homes, to achieve a more compact city. Compactness can reduce tax costs by reducing the amount of land that otherwise needs new infrastructure and services extended into the countryside. Compact cities also provide more convenient access to activities by ways other than driving. Homeowners who participated in developing the Comprehensive Plan were not opposed in principle to this concept, but NIMBY ("not in my back yard") is the common response when individual zoning requests are filed that would help to accomplish these goals.

Certainly it is easier and better to plan for mixed housing on "greenfields," so that, at least theoretically, everyone knows what to expect when they move in to the neighborhood. But the adopted Plan also instructs us to find ways to return to areas that are fully or partially developed and sensitively plan for infill housing and redevelopment in these areas. That requires listening to the concerns of current homeowners, trying to understand and respond to those concerns, and balancing the goals of efficiency and compactness with other stated goals in the Comprehensive Plan calling for single-family homes which make up nearly two-thirds of our housing stock to be preserved and stabilized.

The Planning Department and Planning Commission have seen a rash of cases in the past few months in which developers and neighborhoods are struggling to balance these goals:

- ① **Antelope Park Neighborhood:** Nearly 3/4 of the property owners in this neighborhood, which lies between 27th Street and Antelope Park south of South Street, petitioned the City to "down-zone" their neighborhood by changing the zoning district from R-4 to R-2. Planning staff supported this change because the neighborhood has achieved a healthy mix of housing and a density that is consistent with the goals of efficiency and compactness. The Planning Commission also supported the request, but with some Commissioners suggesting that "down-zoning" was not the only or best solution all of our City neighborhoods. This case is scheduled to be heard by the City Council on August 25.
- ① **84th and Van Dorn:** Neighbors to the west of this 13-acre parcel at the southwest corner of the intersection have similar concerns to those homeowners on the north side of the City. The applicant in this case is asking to amend the approved plan for this tract to increase the number of apartment units and the amount of commercial area. Although he is offering greater setbacks, more buffer landscaping, and an assurance of architectural quality, the neighbors are concerned that the additional traffic will cut through their neighborhood streets, unless perhaps a new traffic signal is installed at the intersection of 84th and Rockledge, south of Van Dorn. The City Traffic Engineer has voiced similar concerns in this case about a new signal. The Planning Commission will hear this case on August 20.
- ① **Northview Villas:** The owner of a five-acre tract south and west of North 27th Street and Superior Street requested a special permit to construct apartments on land zoned R-4. Planning staff recommended approval, because apartments were a logical transition between commercial uses and the lower density neighborhood. But the Planning Commission and City Council both voted to deny this request due to neighborhood concerns, which focused on traffic. Shortly after the special permit request was submitted, the neighborhood association filed to "down-zone" this same property from R-4 to R-2. The Planning Commission placed the association's application on pending until September, while they meet with the applicant to try to reach common ground on the future use of this property. The association is now discussing the possibility of office zoning with the developer, which they see as a quieter neighbor even though office uses generate more traffic than apartments. Both parties are suggesting that a new signal at the intersection of 24th and Superior is a must as part of this new option, but the City Traffic Engineer is concerned that another signal on Superior will reduce the safety and capacity of that high-volume arterial.
- ① **40th and Randolph:** Neighborhood concerns were raised by a proposal to develop an apartment complex on the interior of the block north and east of this intersection, along with a large daycare center near the corner. The concerns led to the formation of a new neighborhood association, Witherbee, which is leading the opposition to the proposed special permits and has filed a request to "down-zone" a 12-block area including the block in question from R-4 to R-2. The Planning Department in our staff report to the Planning Commission joined the opposition to the proposed apartments and daycare center as incompatible with the scale and density of this established neighborhood. But we did not support the "down-zone" request in this case, because we think there are opportunities for more compatible, responsible infill development and for some conversion of single family to duplex to meet the goals of compactness and a mix of housing. *(Continued on next page)*

The Planning Department cannot begin this analysis immediately, and we do not expect any easy answers. But we do hope to begin work on this issue before the end of this year, and we hope to enlist many of the now-seasoned veterans of these and other recent "zoning wars".



# CAUGHT IN TRAFFIC

No it's not the title to the latest summer film release about life in Southern California. It is the bane of our modern lives.

Try as we may, American cities continue to face the chronic problem of how to move people across the urban landscape. Automobile ownership grows each year; the number of miles driven reaches new heights; and ridership sinks further as transit services become less competitive.

Yes, we seek ways to enhance the capacity of our streets to move cars and trucks. But at the same time we also need to find other opportunities for people to move about the community. These opportunities must support not just daily commuters but everyone who travels – including children and young people, senior citizens, and those without access to cars.

Lincoln and Lancaster County are taking a serious look at how to increase mobility opportunities in our community through a "Multi-Modal Transportation" study. This study is an outgrowth of the recently adopted City-County Comprehensive Plan.

The study involves a year-long process. A draft report is targeted for release in June, 2004 that will give serious consideration to alternative modes that can help ease congestion and provide greater mobility for all Lincoln area residents.



The study is being guided by the Planning Department, with assistance from the City Public Works and Utilities Department, City Parks and Recreation Department and other local public agencies.

A 16-member citizen group called the Multi-Modal Transportation Task Force will help formulate a draft Multi-Modal

Transportation Plan by providing critical insights into the viability of alternative travel options. In addition, the study will seek broad public involvement throughout the process. Hundreds of local households will be surveyed by telephone; several focus group sessions will be held; a series of open houses will be conducted; numerous personal one-on-one interviews will be completed with key community leaders; and a website has been set up to provide information and solicit ideas.

Aiding the study effort will be the consulting firm of SRF from Minneapolis, Minnesota. This firm has extensive experience in conducting similar studies for communities across the country.

For further information about the study, contact the Study's Project Manager, Kent Morgan at 441-7491, or visit the Study website at [www.ci.lincoln.ne.us](http://www.ci.lincoln.ne.us) (click on Planning).



**MULTI-MODAL  
TRANSPORTATION**  
*Lincoln, Nebraska*

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